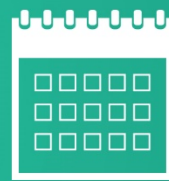




Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by Lawley



OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats your body needs for a wide range of functions. They cannot be produced on their own, so they must come from food or supplements. Despite their well-documented benefits, many people don't get enough omega-3s in their daily diet. Understanding what omega-3s are, why they matter and how to get them can significantly impact your long-term health.

This article explores the health benefits of omega-3 fatty acids, their dietary and supplemental sources, and how to choose the right form to meet your nutritional needs.

The Importance of Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3s are polyunsaturated fats that play a crucial role in maintaining the structure and function of your body's cells. There are three main types of omega-3s:

1. **Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)**—This is found mainly in plant oils such as flaxseed, chia seeds and walnuts.
2. **Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)**—This is found in fatty fish and fish oil and is known for its anti-inflammatory effects.
3. **Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)**—Also found in fatty fish and fish oil, DHA is especially important for brain and eye health.

These fatty acids are involved in the following bodily processes:

- **Inflammation reduction**—Chronic inflammation is a driver of many common diseases, including

heart disease, cancer and arthritis. Omega-3s help regulate the body's inflammatory response.

- **Cardiovascular health enhancement**—Omega-3s are known to lower blood pressure, reduce triglycerides, slow plaque development in arteries and decrease the risk of abnormal heart rhythms.
- **Brain and mental health boost**—Studies show that people who get enough omega-3s may have a lower risk of depression, Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive decline.
- **Joint and skin support**—Omega-3s may help relieve joint pain and stiffness and can also support healthy skin by regulating oil production and reducing signs of aging.
- **Prenatal and infant development**—DHA is vital for the development of the fetal brain and eyes, which is why omega-3 supplementation is often recommended during pregnancy.

Sources of Omega-3s

The best way to get your omega-3s is through whole foods. Eating a variety of nutrient-rich options, such as the following foods, can ensure you're consuming all three types of omega-3 fatty acids:

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- **Fatty fish**—Salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout and anchovies are the richest sources of EPA and DHA.
- **Shellfish**—Oysters and mussels contain omega-3s, although in smaller amounts.
- **Plant-based sources**—Flaxseeds (and flaxseed oil), chia seeds, hemp seeds and walnuts are good sources of ALA.
- **Fortified foods**—Some products, such as eggs, milk, cereals, yogurt and juices, are fortified with omega-3s.

If you rarely eat fish or have dietary restrictions or allergies, you might not get enough omega-3s from food alone. In that case, a health care provider might recommend a supplement such as the following:

- **Fish oil**—The most common supplement, offering EPA and DHA, is fish oil. It's available in capsules, soft gels and liquids.
- **Krill oil**—Extracted from tiny crustaceans, krill oil contains omega-3s in a phospholipid form, which may be easier for the body to absorb.
- **Algal oil**—A plant-based option derived from algae, providing DHA (and sometimes EPA), algal oil can be a great choice for vegetarians and vegans.
- **Cod liver oil**—This oil also contains vitamins A and D along with EPA and DHA, but excessive amounts can lead to vitamin toxicity.

Factors to Consider When Choosing a Supplement

Look for a product that lists the amounts of EPA and DHA and uses well-absorbed forms like triglycerides or phospholipids. Omega-3 supplements are available in liquid, capsule and pill forms. Omega-3 oils can go rancid over time, leading to an unpleasant fishy smell or aftertaste, so choose supplements with antioxidants like vitamin E. The foul smell can also mean the supplement has become less potent or harmful. Lastly, make sure they are properly sealed and stored.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises that adults can safely consume up to 3 grams per day of combined EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids, with no

more than 2 grams from dietary supplements. Exceeding this amount may increase the risk of adverse effects, such as excessive bleeding.

The FDA doesn't approve dietary supplements for safety and effectiveness or their labeling. Rather, supplement manufacturers are responsible for ensuring their products are safe and accurately labeled. As a result, dietary supplement labels may be misleading. It's vital to read the label carefully and purchase high-quality supplements that have been independently tested.

For More Information

Consult with a health care professional before starting any supplement, especially if you take blood thinners or have a medical condition.